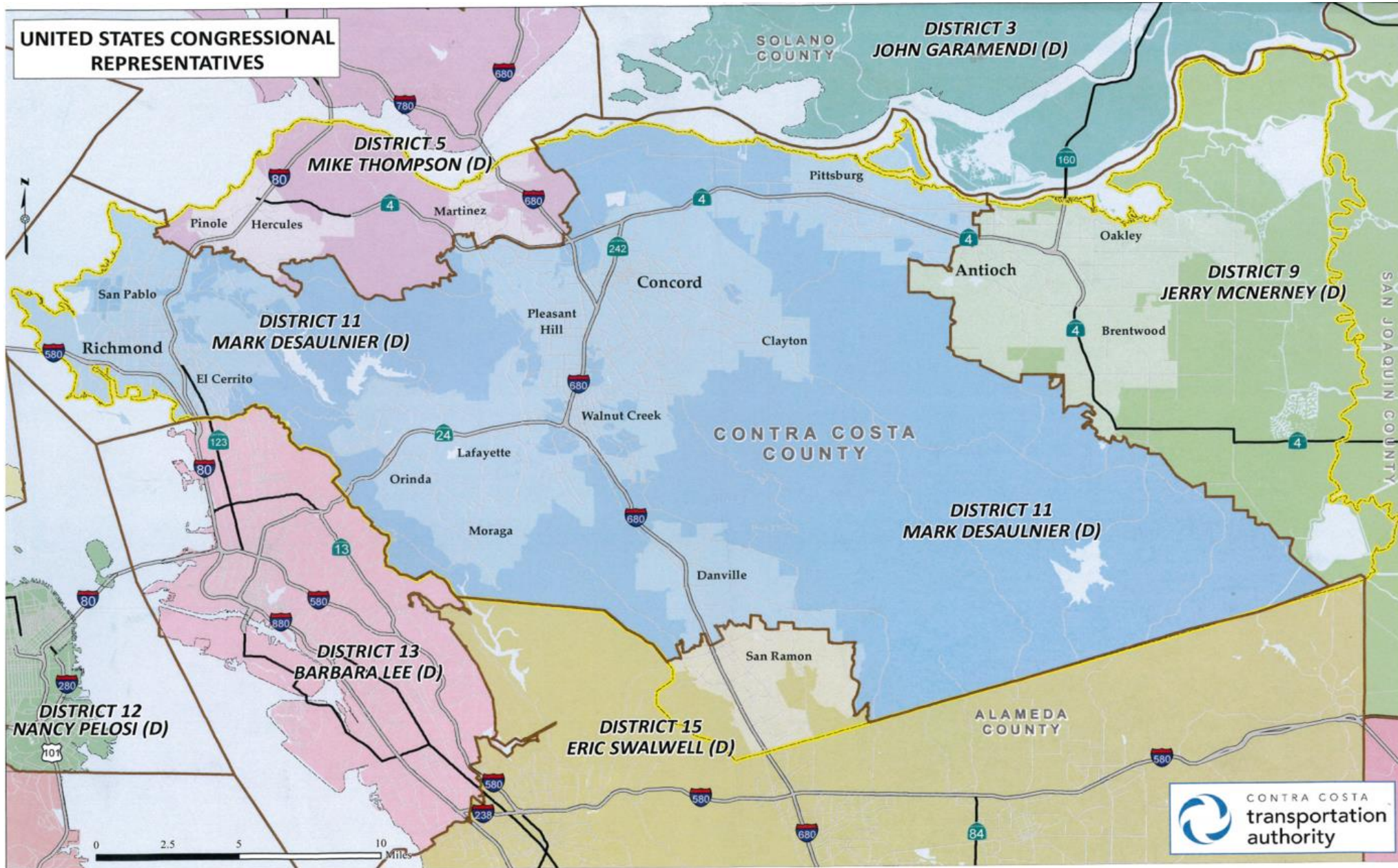




# The Growing Youth Mental Health Crisis

with Special Guest Vicki Harrison, MSW

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# Mental Health in Children

- ▶ Prior to the coronavirus pandemic, mental health disorders were the foremost cause of disability and poor life outcomes in children. **In 2016, 7.7 million children had a treatable mental health disorder, but approximately half of these children did not receive adequate treatment.**
- ▶ Between 2009 and 2019, mental health outcomes worsened in high school students.
  - ▶ The proportion experiencing persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness increased 40%
  - ▶ The number of students seriously considering a suicide attempt increased 36%
  - ▶ The proportion who created a suicide plan increased 44%
- ▶ From 2007 to 2018, **suicide rates among children aged 10-24 increased 57%.**



# The Pandemic's Impact

- ▶ A study of 80,000 children worldwide found that **anxiety and depression doubled during the pandemic.**
  - ▶ 25% of youth experienced depressive symptoms and 20% experienced anxiety symptoms.
- ▶ Clinical data shows that in early 2021, emergency room visits for suspected suicide attempts were 51% higher for adolescent girls and 4% higher for adolescent boys.
- ▶ Around a third of high school students felt unhappy or depressed much more often than usual during the height of the pandemic.
- ▶ Among beneficiaries of Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) under age 18, **the number of children receiving mental health care dropped 50% from February to October 2020.**
- ▶ Over 140,000 children in the U.S. lost a primary or secondary caregiver as a result of the pandemic.

# Social Media's Impacts on Children's Mental Health

- ▶ Social media apps are designed to be addictive. A lack of likes on a social media post can feel disappointing and may drive children to risky behaviors in order to seek validation.
- ▶ The use of filters and airbrushing on pictures of people can lead to unrealistic and distorted ideas about body image.
- ▶ Seeing pictures of others at a gathering might lead to feelings of exclusion for those who were not invited.
- ▶ Cyberbullying is linked with anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, or other mental health disorders.
- ▶ Pictures of others flaunting expensive clothes or luxury items can lead to negative comparisons and low self esteem.
- ▶ The need to check social media apps or post content can cause distraction at school and poor academic performance.

# Concerning Trends in Social Media

- ▶ Around 40% of adolescent girls and 20% of adolescent boys reported using social media for 3+ hours a day.
- ▶ 33% of children aged 7-9 years old use social media apps.
- ▶ An internal Facebook study found that “32% of teen girls said that when they feel bad about their bodies, Instagram made them feel worse.”
- ▶ Cyberbullying victims are around twice as likely to attempt suicide than those who have not experienced cyberbullying. Cyberbullies are about 1.5 times as likely to attempt suicide compared to those who have not been the victim or perpetrator of cyberbullying.
- ▶ Racist, sexist, and homophobic hate speech is prevalent on social media, with 64% of teens saying they encountered such content sometimes, and 21% saying they encountered it often.

# Actions in Congress

- ▶ **Co-Chair of bipartisan Trauma-Informed Care Caucus**
- ▶ **Suicide Prevention Assistance Act (H.R. 2648)** – This bill would create a grant program to help integrate mental health screenings as part of primary care visits. The legislation was developed after research showed that approximately half of all individuals who die by suicide had visited their primary care doctor within a month prior to death.
- ▶ **Early Childhood Mental Health Support Act (H.R. 5569)** – This bill would increase access to mental health services for young children enrolled in Head Start and early childhood education centers. This legislation was developed based on estimates that one in five children have a diagnosable mental disorder, and evidence of better outcomes in children who receive earlier treatment.
- ▶ **Funding for National Child Traumatic Stress Network** – This program, made up of over 250 centers and affiliates nationwide, provides screening and evidence-based treatment to approximately 60,000 children annually who have been exposed to traumatic events.
- ▶ **Mental Health Matters Act (H.R. 7780)** – Series of mental health policy priorities that would help support the behavioral health of students and school staff, strengthen school-based behavioral health care, and ensure access to mental health and substance use disorder benefits for workers and their families.
- ▶ **Supported amendment to Restoring Hope for Mental Health and Well-Being Act (H.R. 7666)** – Would authorize NIH to conduct independent research into the effects of technology and social media on children's cognitive, physical, and socio-emotional development.

# Additional Resources for Parents and Children

- ▶ The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, through its Child Welfare Information Gateway, publishes a comprehensive list of resources for parents and children seeking to stay safe on social media platforms.
  - ▶ <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/management/workforce/socialmedia/safety/>
- ▶ Internet Matters, a nonprofit dedicated to helping parents keep their children safe online, has compiled resources for parents on social media safety.
  - ▶ <https://www.internetmatters.org/resources/social-media-advice-hub2/>
- ▶ The National Alliance on Mental Illness put together a list of youth mental health resources for children of all ages.
  - ▶ <https://www.nami.org/Blogs/From-the-CEO/April-2022/The-Crisis-of-Youth-Mental-Health>



# Contact Our Office

## Walnut Creek

3100 Oak Road  
Suite 110  
Walnut Creek, CA  
(925) 933-2660

## Richmond

440 Civic Center Plaza  
Second Floor  
Richmond, CA  
(510) 620-1000

## Washington, DC

503 Cannon HOB  
Washington, DC  
(202) 225-2095



Facebook: /RepMarkDeSaulnier



Instagram: @RepDeSaulnier



Twitter: @RepDeSaulnier



Website: [desaulnier.house.gov](http://desaulnier.house.gov)